

On Senator DURBIN's staff: David Lazarus, Tom Faletti, Dena Morris, and Chris Kang, all of whom helped in many ways.

On Senator REID's staff: Mike Castellano and Mark Weitjen.

On Senator KLOBUCHAR's staff: Tamara Fucile and Katie Nilan.

On Senator NELSON's staff: Chris Day.

Then on the Republican side of the Commerce Committee, I will tell my colleagues they were fantastic and they spent hours and hours and hours working through issues and through this process. They played an important role.

So my thanks to Paul Nagle, Megan Beechener, Mark Delich, Peter Phipps, Rebecca Hooks, and Christine Kurth.

Again, oftentimes the Senators get the credit for things, but we do not give the staff enough credit.

On Senator COLLINS' staff: Asha Mathews was critical, and she was great in helping in many different ways with Senator COLLINS who played a very important part in this legislation.

I thank my colleagues for this week. I know we worked very hard and we were very persistent. But one of the great things about this week is we saw what the Senate can do. We saw if we make up our minds that we are going to do something good for this country, the Senate can do it. We worked together. We kept all the nongermane amendments off the bill. We had several on our side, and there were a few over here. We had more on our side, but we kept all of those nongermane amendments off the bill. We had a spirit of cooperation and collegiality and it was great. It was fun to be a part of it. It reminds me, once again, how great an institution the Senate is.

I again one last time thank all of my colleagues for their support and all the floor staff here for doing all the great things they did to get us where we are today. This is a great day for the Senate and a great day for the American people. Now this bill will have to go to conference and the hard work starts. But I feel confident that we will be able to work with our House colleagues, who worked so hard on their legislation to get something done, and hopefully in the next several weeks, whenever that may be, it will come back to the Senate for the final vote and we can get it to the White House.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Vermont is recognized.

THE BUDGET

Mr. SANDERS. Mr. President, if one watches the Presidential campaign, one finds that virtually all of those who have run for President and those who remain in the campaign are talking about change, change, and change. While I think each of them may differ with the other as to exactly what they mean by change, what they are picking up is the very serious unhappiness of

the American people in terms of the direction this country is going.

What people perceive and what the candidates are picking up on is that the middle class is shrinking. We have tens of millions of people who wake up in the morning, they go to the gas station, they are paying \$3.20 for a gallon of gas. Home heating oil is soaring. In many cases, the wages of workers are going down. People are losing their health insurance. They are losing their pensions. They are seeing their jobs go to China and other low-wage countries. The people in our country do not feel good about the state of our economy. They want changes. They want to move this country in a different direction. Fundamentally, I believe, what they want is a new set of national priorities.

As my colleagues may know, this afternoon the Senate Budget Committee voted on and passed a new budget. This budget, appropriately enough, rejects President Bush's incredibly bad budget, which continues the process of providing huge tax breaks to people who don't need it and then cutting back on the needs of the middle class and working families in terms of massive cuts in Medicare, in Medicaid, eliminating completely the weatherization program, and cutting back significantly on LIHEAP at a time when the need for heating assistance is greater now than ever before. Altogether, it is a budget which puts money where we should not be putting money and cuts back on those programs which people desperately need.

Next week, as I understand it, the budget will be coming to the Senate floor. We will be debating the budget that was passed by the Budget Committee this afternoon. While I happen to believe the budget we passed was a good budget—certainly a major, major, major improvement over what President Bush gave us we can make significant improvements upon what we passed this afternoon. So I will be offering several amendments. The major one will essentially be asking the Senate to change the national priorities of this country and to begin responding to the millions of working families who know that something is wrong in America. They know that while poverty increases, while the middle class shrinks, the people on top have never had it so good. They know that ordinary people understand there is something strange when the wealthiest Nation in the history of the world cannot provide quality health care to all of its people; that our infrastructure is deteriorating before our very eyes; that we have the highest rate of childhood poverty in the industrialized world; that all over our country food shelves are being descended upon—not by unemployed people alone, not by disabled people, not by poor people but by people who are working 40 or 50 hours a week and can't afford with their wages to provide the nutrition their families need. People understand there is some-

thing deeply, deeply wrong in this country, and that we have to move in a new direction.

My amendment is very simple. It is going to give the Members of the Senate a very stark choice about whether we want change, about whether we want to move this country in a new direction. This is what it does. It couldn't be simpler. It says that at a time when the wealthiest people in this country have never had it so good since the 1920s in terms of a huge increase in their income, in terms of the fact that we now have by far the most unequal distribution of income and wealth of any major country, where the top 1 percent now earn more income than the bottom 50 percent, what we are saying is that it is time we rescind President Bush's tax breaks that go to people who make at least \$1 million. That is the top three-tenths of 1 percent; 99.7 percent of the people would not be impacted by this amendment. It says: Let us rescind those tax breaks for millionaires and billionaires, and when we do that, we will raise about \$51 billion.

Now, what can we do with that \$51 billion, and what does this amendment include? First, it says that since President Bush has been in office, we have had record-breaking deficits. We now have a \$9 trillion national debt. We are fighting a war we are not paying for, but that our kids and our grandchildren will be paying for. So in this amendment, of the \$51 billion we raise by rescinding tax breaks for millionaires, we are going to put \$10 billion into deficit reduction. That leaves \$41 billion.

This is what this amendment would do. It would provide \$15 billion for special education. The Presiding Officer may remember that some years ago the Congress—the Government of the United States—made a commitment to school districts all over America and said: If you mainstream kids with disabilities, if you put them into public schools, if you treat them as every other kid, we will provide 40 percent of the cost of that special education. That is what the Government said. Unfortunately, the Government did not keep its word.

So what we see in Vermont—and I suspect in Colorado and all over the country—is the school districts are paying enormous sums of money out of local taxes, often regressive property taxes, to fund special education. All over America, what we are seeing is more and more kids, for whatever reason—and that is a long discussion we need to have—are having problems, are being seen as having special ed needs. It is an expensive proposition. We are saying, let's begin to keep our word to school districts all over America. Let's relieve the pressure of local property taxes. Let's put \$15 billion into special education.

In addition, what this amendment would do is provide a \$7 billion increase for Head Start. One of the great scandals in our Nation today is that we

have the highest rate of childhood poverty—far higher than any other industrialized country; that working parents are finding it almost impossible to acquire quality, affordable child care; that Head Start openings are much greater than can be accommodated all over the country. We are saying Head Start is a program that works. It provides an opportunity for early childhood education for low-income kids.

Let's expand that program to make sure working families can take advantage of that program and let's put \$7 billion into expanding Head Start.

We also, for the same reasons, put \$2.2 billion into the child care and the development block grant program that will ensure every eligible family receives access to child care.

I know in my State—and, again, I suspect in most States in this country—people are being weighed down by very high local taxes, including regressive property taxes.

What this amendment does is provide \$5 billion for school construction, modernization and repairs, to fix our crumbling schools. What this does is not only help local property taxes and not only help our school kids get modern buildings in which to learn, it also creates a lot of jobs as we rebuild one of the long neglected areas of our infrastructure, and that is our crumbling schools.

This amendment would also provide an additional \$3 billion for LIHEAP, the Low-Income Heating Assistance Program. I just, this afternoon, spoke to the directors of various community action programs in the State of Vermont. In my State—and my State may be a little bit different than some because it gets pretty cold there. We have had 20 below zero weather in the last couple weeks. There is a real level of stress regarding the availability of LIHEAP because the cost of home heating fuels is soaring. There is just not that availability. There is not enough money in the LIHEAP fund. We would put \$3 billion more into LIHEAP, which helps, by the way, not only low-income families and senior citizens in the wintertime in cold-weather States, but it helps other families in States where the weather gets to be 110 degrees.

As I mentioned earlier, in this great country, the wealthiest country in the history of the world, we must be embarrassed that we have large numbers of people who literally go hungry, who don't have enough food. That number is growing. I know Senator HARKIN, among others, has called for a significant increase in the Food Stamp Program. That is exactly what we should be doing. This amendment would provide \$5 billion for food stamps to make sure millions of families with kids have enough food to sustain them.

Lastly, this amendment would provide \$3.8 billion to allow the special supplemental nutrition program for Women, Infants, and Children, the WIC Program, to provide nutritious food to

over 4 million families. Kids whose mothers have good nutrition and good prenatal experience, obviously, will do better in life. We want to make sure the WIC Program has the resources they need.

So, ultimately, what this amendment is about is pretty simple: We say that in a time when millions of Americans, low- and moderate-income people, are in need, it is the obligation and the right of the U.S. Government to reach out and address those serious problems facing the middle-class and working families of our Nation. And at a time when the wealthiest people in this country have never had it so good and at the same time have been given huge tax breaks by the Bush administration, we say it is appropriate to rescind those tax breaks in order to help millions of people in need. That is what this amendment is about. It calls for a fundamental change in national priorities, and it moves this country in a very different and, I think, more moral direction. I look forward to the support of my colleagues for this amendment that we will offer as part of the budget debate.

I yield the floor and suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Ms. KLOBUCHAR. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

THANKING SENATORS AND STAFF

Ms. KLOBUCHAR. Mr. President, I am here today to thank the many Senators and staff who worked on this sweeping consumer protection reform. This is going to mean so much for so many children across this country. It is going to make a difference, and we are really never going to know it.

I can tell you from the parents I have met who have had to deal with their kids ingesting Aqua Dot that morphed into a date-rape drug, or another whose child swallowed a charm that was 39-percent lead, those mothers came to the Capitol because they did not want it to happen to anyone else. Today, we told them we are listening to them, and we are making a difference in the lives of families throughout the country.

The difference started with the Commerce Committee and the very good staff we have on that committee. Before I acknowledge them, I wish to acknowledge my own staff.

I am so proud of the work they did. Tamara Fucile took this issue on as a personal matter. Her children actually had some of the Thomas the Train sets. I cannot tell you to how many hearings she carried those trains, chewed on by her own children, and I would hold them up to show Senators this was a real thing. I thank Tamara, and I also

thank her children for parting with their toys, although they are recalled toys.

Kate Nilan has been doing a wonderful job with our office working on these consumer issues. In the last week, Kate was very involved in making sure that our amendment, which banned industries paying for travel, industries that the consumer protection agency is supposed to be regulating, the amendment that Senator MENENDEZ and I did got voted on in this body 94 to 0. It is because of the good work of Kate Nilan in putting that amendment together and working out the procedural issues.

I thank both of my staff members for their fine work on this bill. Tamara was also very involved in the lead standard. She originally worked with me when we said: Why would we not have a Federal lead standard for toys? Why would we have State-by-State standards and some States do not have them and they are different all over the place? We finally have an aggressive lead standard that basically bans lead in children's toys, the first year allowing some trace levels and going down after that. That was Tamara's good work.

I wish to acknowledge the Commerce staff who worked hard on this bill from the beginning: David Strickland was there every step of the way, as well as Alex Hoehn-Saric for his work, and Price Feland, a member of Senator PRYOR's staff, as well as staff of Senator DURBIN who got involved in this issue early on when Senator DURBIN and I met in Chicago with a number of the toy retailers and manufacturers that were concerned about this and knew something had to change in Washington in terms of the funding for this agency, as well as the tools they have to do their jobs.

Senator NELSON has played such an instrumental role when it came to making sure we had third-party verification, as well as the durable goods standard in the bill; then, of course, Senator STEVENS and Senator COLLINS, who assisted in getting bipartisan support for the bill, and Senator PRYOR, who managed it during this week flawlessly.

We are very excited about the change today, that I can go home tonight and tell my 12-year-old daughter—who, I have to tell you, was rather embarrassed about this whole thing when her mom was involved when it was about SpongeBob SquarePants, but when the Barbies started getting recalled, she came into the kitchen and said: Mom, this is really getting serious. So I am going to be able to go home today and tell her we did something good in the Senate.

I yield the floor, and I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. REID. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.